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ABSTRACT

In order to teach in the content area, a teacher must accept five basic premises: (1) Reading in the content field is part of the total school program. (2) All teachers are responsible for helping students read the text in a specific subject. (3) The focus of teaching is changed from merely teaching content to how to read and understand the content. (4) Teaching reading in the content fields is fused with the teaching of content. (5) There is a commonality of teaching procedure and skills which permeates each content area. In order to operate on these premises, students must be taught certain reading study skills. First, a purpose for reading must be established; the student must be consciously looking for some type of information. Second, textbook organization must be noted. The student should be able to see how the author has organized the work by such clues as the table of contents, preface, study unit introductions, bold-faced headings, vocabulary listings, end-of-chapter questions, and summarizing paragraphs. Third, the pattern of writing must be determined. Various paragraph styles are used in different content areas. Through the fusion of reading skills and technique with subject matter, the student must be informed of the process and the reasons for the procedures. (JF)

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Content Area Reading

When a teacher considers reading in his content subject, he will note that he is involved with one aspect of language usage and that much of his students' difficulties with the subject will in some way be interwoven with their language facility. Indeed, it may be unequivocally stated that each content teacher is a teacher of language -- the English language as it is used in the subject he teaches.

Basic Premises

Teacher acceptance of the language base of his subject and of his responsibility to help his students become competent in the subject through the ability to use its language results in the realization of the following premises:

1. Reading in the content fields is part of the total school program. It is, indeed, a very essential part that reaches all the students in the school.
2. All teachers are responsible to help students read his specific subject. Language facility is basic to both communication and thought processes within the content subjects. Then, obviously, the teacher most capable of helping a student read the material of a specific subject is the teacher who teaches it.
3. The focus of teaching is changed from teaching content solely, to how to read and understand the content. A review of the reading process quickly shows that reading material must contain some content. The act of reading is not subject matter, but instead a means of obtaining information from the printed page. Therefore, the focus of teaching is to teach the students the skills and techniques by using the information in the content material.

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4. Teaching reading in the content fields is fused with the teaching of content. Reading is not separate nor efficiently taught apart from content. The two are accomplished simultaneously by using instruction in skills as the means, with the end being the acquisition of content as well as growth in skill competency.
5. There is a commonality of teaching procedure and skills which permeates each content area as well as specific skills emphasized in each according to its nature. All content subjects require the study of specific vocabulary, yet the vocabulary of each is different. All subjects require the acquisition of appropriate comprehension skills; main ideas, organization, cause and effect, drawing conclusions, and so on. But the patterns of writing in each subject require different emphases and application of skills. For instance, much reading in English is narrative and descriptive. Yet, in mathematics, much of the reading centers around paragraphs of definition and explanation of process.

Basic teaching procedure, as well as study technique, involve student use and independence in 1) becoming ready to read a selection or assignment such as previewing, delineating the basic concepts, and establishing specific purposes for reading; 2) reading the selection to accomplish the purposes; 3) thinking about the information to garner the necessary understandings; and 4) re-reading or reviewing as necessary for the purpose of futher clarification. In this series of steps, the teacher either directs him or the student guides himself through the material three times. The first is the preview to determine the parameters and type of information, the second is to read for detail in accordance to specified purposes, and the third is to re-read those parts which still need further clarification.

Student independence suggests his successful use of language as it is used in each of the content disciplines. The reading-study skills involved are numerous but the student needs to apply them if he is to use the language effectively, especially the reading aspect of language.

Selected Reading-Study Skills

The study skills which will be discussed are (1) establishing a purpose for reading, (2) noting textbook organization, and (3) determining the patterns of writing used by the author.

Establishing a purpose for reading. This is a skills, I am continually amazed to find, that so few high school students use. Repeatedly I have asked high school students, as they are studying their assignments, what they wish to find out. The answers I have received most of the time are the genre, "My teacher told us to read this for tomorrow" or "We have these questions to answer" or "We must be reading to discuss and/or take a test on this material." Hardly ever do I get from the student the type of information or ideas he is hoping to get.

Most of us have, at some time, tried to convince and direct the student in an effective study procedure. The most common one used is Francis Robinson's SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) formula or some variation of it. Readily you see that the "Q" means question -- purpose for reading. As educators we see this formula as an effective procedure for the student's direction of his study. My point of concern here is that the students do not seem to use it; indeed, they do not know what they should find out as they read. A logical inference is that the students have not been guided in the use of the formula and shown its effectiveness. We do not seem to be teaching a process of study.

Establishing purpose for reading is an elemental and a basic reading-study skills. For, indeed, it embodies the specific objective(s) of the student for reading the material. And, it determines his approach to the study of the material. If his purpose -- question -- is general, his reading may be more casula and faster than if he needed to find our specific facts sorted into a logical order. Then he must read much more slowly. Also, we know that if the student is consciously looking for some type of information, his mind is much less apt to wander. His attention becomes directed when he knows what he wishes to find out.

Noting textbook organization. Most textbooks are organized for a logical presentation of the information for ease in locating and noting the organization of the information. Again, it has been my observation that many high school students veritably see the trees but not the forest. They do not note the overall organization but seem to read only for specific information to memorize for a class recitation or test. To see how the items of information relate seems to elude them. Quote one student, "I know the facts, but they don't make sense."

Perhaps instruction is needed to assist the student toward seeing the "wholeness" of the information. Ask yourselves these questions about your students:

1. Do they see the Table of Contents as the basic outline of major topics of the book? Do they see the organization of the outline -- chronology, historical movement, development from the simple to the more complex, classification, and so on?
2. Do they know that the author may give clues to his organization as well as techniques for study in the Preface or Foreword to the Student?
3. Are the students aware of and use the introduction to units of study?

Do they know what is usually included in an introduction, why the author writes it?

4. Do your students use the bold-faced or topical headings and see the composite of these in a chapter as the author's specific outline? Can they see the logic of how one topical heading lends to the next?
5. Do your students use the vocabulary listing at the end of a unit of study? Can they see the interrelationships of the terms as a means of further seeing the organization?
6. Do your students make use of the end of chapter or unit questions? Can they plot these into the organization of the chapter? Do they see these questions as leads to understandings they are expected to know?
7. Do your students make use of special study aids such as inserts, "Things to Remember" and so on?
8. Can your students spot summarizing paragraphs? Do they know where to find them and what they should contain?
9. Can and do your students make use of special listings such as of maps and appendices?

Teaching textbook organization is not a "one time thing." Teachers may and often do spend time on these aids when introducing the textbook to the students. But, instruction in these aids to textbook organization should be intrinsically developed in classroom procedure throughout the school term.

The importance of this is fundamental. Indeed, seeing the organization of information is basic to adequate comprehension.

Determining the pattern of writing. It seems that a key to effective comprehension is the ability of the reader to follow the author's pattern of thought. As noted above, part of the organization of thought can be seen by the table of contents and the topical headings of the chapters. Now, we wish to delve more deeply into the way the author is arranging his ideas. We need to investigate the paragraph organization or patterns.

When we get into the area of paragraph patterns we find ourselves with a very interesting situation that at times seems a little nebulous. Whereas we can classify and name patterns of paragraphs, each author's organization and style is uniquely his. Therefore, the writing we wish to analyze may be very direct or quite subtle in organization. It may also be very clear or somewhat garbled (even in textbooks).

We find several types of patterns used quite commonly in the factual prose of textbook writing. The most common pattern seems to be the main idea followed by details in which the main idea is expressed in the first sentence and the details either explain, elaborate upon, condition, give examples or a combination of these of the main idea. We find the paragraph of definition to be very common in textbooks in which the main idea is the definition. Other patterns found are following directions; an enumeration, series, or chronology; cause and effect; comparison and contrast and problem-solving. In fictional materials we find patterns of description and narration. Each of these patterns can be found in some printed material of all the content areas. Depending upon the author's style, the patterns may be in combination; i.e., main idea followed by detail with definition.

However, each content area has its own preference to specific styles because of the essential nature of the information just the same as all of the skills of reading are needed in each discipline though each in turn has an emphasis upon specific skills. The paragraph patterns of English materials, which may be largely fictional, would center around description and narration. With paragraphs of these types, the main idea is often not stated but must be supplied by the reader as a type of summation. The essay may use the main idea followed by detail or any of the others that have been cited.

In the social studies, the main idea followed by detail is widely used. In the anlaysis of one social studies textbook, 50% of the paragraphs were of this type. Other types may be ones of definition, cause and effect, chronology and sometimes problem-solving. The social studies, as well as English, require as well much extensive reading.

In science, again, main idea followed by detail is most common. However, in the intensity of science writing where often there seems to be an infinite number of important details, we find patterns of definition, classification, explanation, cause and effect, following directions and problem-solving. One science textbook used the problem-solving pattern 75% of the time. This pattern paralleled the steps of the scientific process. The first sentence of this type is in the form of a question or problem with the remaining sentences stating hypotheses, evidence and finding, and finally the conclusions with possible implications.

In mathematics, the patterns are fewer and the amount of reading is quite reduced. But the intensity of writing in mathematics is perhaps the greatest

of all the areas. Indeed, the student may find that he has to read word-by-word in some problems and theorems. Such a mode of reading is usually frowned upon in subjects such as English and the social studies. The patterns usually found in mathematics are explanation of process with a step-by-step example, definition and following directions.

You may be wondering how the knowledge of paragraph patterns can help students read and study more effectively. The implication is that the student should be taught to note the patterns used by an author(s) of his textbook so that he can more readily follow the author's development of thought. Indeed, in the analysis of textbooks in the same discipline, you will see that each author seems to have a penchant for particular patterns. Each has his own style. Therefore, it would seem wise to assist the student in determining the patterns used and how these patterns are constructed. For instance, with the social studies textbook which had the main idea followed by detail pattern in half of the material, the student should be taught where the main idea of such a paragraph is usually found and to be able to analyze the function of the details. In a paragraph of enumeration, there may not, legitimately, be a main idea expressed by the author; the paragraph may be only a listing. Teachers may find it quite beneficial to analyze some of the key paragraphs sentence by sentence to see how the paragraph is constructed and how its parts (sentences) are related and follow a logical order. This can be a tedious experience, but it is very productive in unravelling a line of thought.

Through the fusion of reading skills and technique with subject matter, the student must be informed of the process and the reasons for the procedures. He needs to see the gestalt of the fusion as a means of leading toward greater self direction, competence and independence.